

## The Path that Leads to Increasing the Value of Life

The life that we receive as a human being is a very rare thing. Therefore our life is so valuable. People in the world do a lot of things to increase the value of their lives. They study, have good jobs, associate with high class people, use valuable devices and vehicles, live in expensive places to promote and increase the value of their lives. However, we can see many people when they age, their value of life decreases. People mostly trust in material things and external people. When those things and people go away, change and end, people worry. In this situation, Buddhism has pointed out how to give a real value to life. If we are clever to keep away our mind from evils, develop mind with positive emotions and purify mind from unwholesome emotions like desire, anger and delusion completely, this is the highest way to give a real value to our lives.

The main purpose of everybody is happiness. People do everything from birth to death in the name of happiness. However, unfortunately, day by day we move away from happiness. The reason is we mostly trust in physical things which are impermanent and out of our control. According to Buddhism, our happiness or suffering completely depends on how far we have purified our mind. Mind generates our physical body. Mind is the main factor that our entire life animates and maintains. Mental condition decides whether we are happy or not. As much as we can listen to what the Buddha taught, we comprehend how to achieve real happiness.

The Buddha wanted to show the path that leads to get rid of unsatisfactoriness and achieve real happiness. That path is very clear and systematic. Listening to this message is a very rare chance. Today we have to listen to it because of a lot of merits and blessings that we have done in previous lives. The sublime truth that the Buddha explained is well expounded (*Svākkhato*), directly visible (*Sanditthiko*), immediately effective (*Akāliko*), calling one to come and see (*Ehipassiko*), leading onwards (*Opanaiko*), to be personally realized by the wise (*Paccattam Veditabbo Vinnuhi*). The Buddha's main purpose was to point out the path of liberation from suffering. If the Buddha has preached any teaching to get rid of suffering, nobody can prove that it doesn't cause to get rid of suffering. According to Buddhism, understanding of suffering and cessation from suffering depend on how far we have achieved intelligence. There are four causes (*Pannavuddhi Karanani*) which help to achieve intelligence (wisdom).

They are;

1. Association with good friends who explain the Buddha's real message (*Sappurisa sansevo*)
2. Listening to the Buddha's Message (*Saddhamma savanam*)
3. Wise Reflection (*Yoniso manasikāro*)
4. Practice (*Dhammānudhamma patipatti*)

As much as we are able to receive these four things in our lives, we can develop wisdom and overcome suffering.

With the association of good friends when we consider the Buddha's message, it is clear that the Buddha kindly explained the path to get rid of suffering and attain supreme happiness. Even though we say that this is the Buddha's message because of his discovery, in actuality it is the reality of the world. Whether a Buddha appeared or not, this world reality is everlasting. We respect the Buddha, because he discovered this reality by himself without the assistance of others and preached it to the world. However his teachings don't belong to him. All Buddhas who arise in this universe during certain periods of time discover this very same message and kindly preach it to the world.

If someone hopes to practice this message and obtain results during one's lifespan, he should first cultivate three good qualities which are intelligence, honesty and loving kindness. As much as someone has these personal traits and if he listens to that message, then he can gain the result which is real happiness. Buddhism invites the world 'to come and see' it, but it never says 'come and believe'. This is where Buddhism differs from other teachings. The believing or not believing of this teaching depends on the level of one's knowledge, understanding, comprehension, intelligence and analysis.

There are a lot of teachings and techniques that we can practice in order to achieve happiness. Various intellectuals have interpreted this message in many different ways. However, all teachings in Buddhism can be divided into three levels as follows:

### **1. The teachings that gain results to success in this life**

Everybody likes to live with happiness and without difficulties in this life. Therefore, Buddhism asks to practice four things which are education, personal wealth (or employment), health and morality (or virtue). Some people think that Buddhism is only for the hereafter (or next birth) not for this life. We can practice Buddha's teachings and can gain the results in this life as well as the hereafter. A lot of teachings in Buddhism relate to succeed in this birth. Succeeding in this first step is similar to obtaining a bachelors' degree. Most people who practice only the above qualities mostly believe only in this birth. They have no confidence in their next life. Conversely, Buddhism doesn't stop in this very first level. Buddhism encourages us to go to the next level, developing more qualities since practicing more qualities means achieving more happiness.

### **2. The teachings that gain results to success in the hereafter**

To succeed in the next life, we have to have an understanding about the Karmic law. The Karmic law means whatever we do with consciousness, we have the same results. If someone does something with a wicked mind, he will have negative results because of a polluted mind. Simultaneously, if someone does something with a pure mind, he will have fruitful results

because of the pure mind. When someone has this understanding, he always tries to overcome evils since he doesn't like negative results. Also, he always tries to practice good deeds because he likes fruitful results. Then he practices three meritorious deeds of generosity (dana), virtue (seela) and meditation (bhavana) that cause us to succeed in this life and thereafter. We mostly suffer because of greed and anger. By practicing generosity we reduce greed. Also, by practicing loving kindness meditation, we reduce anger. Reducing greed and anger mostly cause us to overcome suffering. If a person has done a lot of meritorious deeds in this life, it means that his mind is rich in merits. A Meritorious mind can gain happiness to our life. That is why Buddhism says practicing merit is similar to gaining happiness (*Sukho punnassa uccayo*). Especially, practiced merits bring happiness at the end of life (*Punnam sukham jeevita samkhayomhi*). Succeeding in this second step is similar to obtaining a masters' degree.

### **3. The teachings that gain results to success in the present moment for getting rid of all sufferings**

According to Buddhism the main reason why suffering arises is ignorance (or delusion). Our highest success of life depends on how far we have reduced ignorance. When we experience something through our senses, it arises at the moment with the conditions. Also the experience ceases at the moment without remaining anything. However, we mostly think that after we see or hear something, it remains. This misunderstanding is the main nature of ignorance. At the very beginning of the path of reducing ignorance, we should have clear knowledge of the dependent origination. Understanding of Buddhism depends on understanding of the Dependent Origination.

He who sees the Dependent Origination sees the Dhamma  
(*Yo paticcasamuppādam passati so dhamma passati*)

He who sees the Dhamma sees the Buddha  
(*Yo dhamma passati so mam passati*)

This is the real way how to see the Dhamma and the Buddha as well.

Understanding of the dependent origination depends on understanding of the five aggregates. If we have some sort of experience through our senses, it means five aggregates arise together and they cease together at the same moment. It is instant. As a result of the union of the five aggregates, when factors are together, we have experiences through our senses such as eye, ear, nose, tongue, body. When factors (or conditions) are separated, the experience ceases. The highest intelligence in Buddhism is the intelligence that "Not being occurred (in the past) comes to an occurrence. Being occurred (at the present) would not come to (the future) occurrence" (*Ahutvā sambhutam hutva na bhavissati* - අනුන්වා සම්භුතං හුන්වා න භවිස්සති). If we can understand this ultimate truth practicing insight meditation, that is the only way to get rid of suffering.

Understanding of the Dependent Origination causes us to understand suffering, and understanding suffering helps to understanding the Four Noble Truths which is the main teaching in Buddhism. Arising five aggregates is the first noble truth. Desire, the origin of suffering, which arises because of ignorance, is the second noble truth. Getting rid of suffering is the third noble truth. The path that leads to get rid of suffering is the noble eightfold path which can be included in three disciplines; virtue, concentration and wisdom.

Virtue, concentration or tranquility and wisdom with understanding of dependent origination cause us to get rid of all sufferings and develop real happiness. Virtue means a very high level of discipline in behavior and speech with right vision. With good discipline, if a person focuses his mind on a particular meritorious object such as loving kindness and breathing meditation, then he can concentrate his mind with pure thoughts. With that concentration, one has to reflect on the world reality according to impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*) and selflessness (*anatta*) in the correct way. As a result, one can live without desire and hatred because there is no delusion. When he investigates that present moment, he has only the present moment which didn't come from the past and which doesn't go the future from the present. He sees very well the arising and ceasing of all his experiences at the moment. He doesn't catch anything as 'I', 'my' or 'mine'. He has realized everything as impermanence, unsatisfactoriness, egolessness. Then he can live as a person seeing the truth in a new fresh way. This is the ultimate truth that Buddhism teaches us to be able to get rid of all sufferings. Succeeding in this third step is similar to obtaining a doctorate (PhD) which is the highest degree in any subject.

If we are clever to spend a life with success in the above three levels, we have overcome unsatisfactoriness. Also, then our lives are so valuable. If someone is skillful to live seeing the world reality always as arising and ceasing one day, his life is more valuable than who lives without seeing this reality for hundred years.

*Yo ca vassasataṃ jīve,  
apassaṃ dhammamuttamaṃ;  
Ekāhaṃ jīvitaṃ seyyo,  
passato dhammamuttamaṃ.*

Better it is to live one day seeing the Supreme Truth than to live a hundred years without ever seeing the Supreme Truth.

**May the Triple Gem Bless You!**

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**May All Beings be Well, Happy and Peaceful!**

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